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Ensuring a Transparent, Thorough Investigation of COVID-19's Origin

PRESS STATEMENT

MICHAEL R. POMPEO, SECRETARY OF STATE

JANUARY 15, 2021

The United States has repeatedly called for a transparent and thorough investigation into the origin of COVID-19. Understanding the origin of this pandemic is essential for global public health, economic recovery, and international security.

To assist the vital work of the World Health Organization (WHO) investigative team that arrived in China this week, the United States government is today sharing new information concerning the activities inside China's government laboratories in 2019.

In particular, we urge the WHO to press the government of China to address the following:

- 1. Illnesses at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV):** The United States government has reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses. This raises questions about the credibility of WIV senior researcher Shi Zhengli's public claim that there was "zero infection" among the WIV's staff and students of SARS-CoV-2 or SARS-related viruses.
- 2. WIV Research on "RaTG13" and "gain of function":** Starting in at least 2016, WIV researchers studied RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January 2020 as its closest sample to SARS-CoV-2 (96.2% similar). Since the outbreak, the WIV has not been transparent nor consistent about its work with RaTG13 or other similar viruses, including possible "gain of function" experiments to enhance transmissibility or lethality.
- 3. Secret WIV Links to Military Research:** Despite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution, the WIV has collaborated on publications and secret projects with China's military. The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.

The COVID-19 pandemic was avoidable. Any responsible country would have invited world health investigators to Wuhan within days of an outbreak. China instead refused offers of help – including from the United States – and punished brave Chinese doctors, scientists, and journalists who tried to alert the world to the dangers of the virus. Beijing continues today to withhold vital information that scientists need to protect the world from this deadly virus, and the next one.

The United States reiterates the importance of unfettered access to virus samples, lab records and personnel, eyewitnesses, and whistleblowers to ensure the credibility of the WHO's final report. Until the CCP allows a full and thorough accounting of what happened in Wuhan, it is only a matter of time until China births another pandemic and inflicts it on the Chinese people, and the world.

Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology

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